

A British View

JACQUELINE KEN

By Robin Douglas-Home

I FIRST MET Jacqueline Kennedy at a small party in the White House in November 1961. At the time I was staying at the British Embassy and had been introduced to her by the British Ambassador, then Sir David Ormsby-Gore. We exchanged a few words, mostly social clichés, nothing more...

I did not meet Jacqueline Kennedy again until August 1962. Her sister, Princess Lee Radziwill, had rented a villa in the Italian coastal village of Ravello, south of Naples, and she had asked me to spend some time there while I was recuperating from an illness. A few days after I arrived, Jacqueline Kennedy flew in from Washington with her daughter, Caroline, and a nanny.

One evening a few days later, after a day spent swimming, sun-bathing and water-skiing, the others went to bed early and Jacqueline Kennedy and I were left alone. We talked ... and talked ... and talked ...

We talked first in the high-ceilinged drawing-room of the villa. Then, as it grew late, we moved outside into the garden and sat on the wall looking down on the tiny main square of Ravello, with its church and its cafés and the fairy-lights that had been strung out in her honour. These hours of conversation were, I think, the most immediately emotionally disturbing I have ever had.

Bird in a Gilded Cage

LET ME attempt to explain why. The first impression I gained was that she had been literally projected into a position where she could rarely, if ever, be completely herself or do anything, go anywhere, say anything, laugh, cry, drink, or even talk as she wished, without the fear of becoming the subject of public comment, political gossip, or social tittle-tattle. And, that although all of this sickened her, she was forced to put up with it because of her loyalty to her husband and his vulnerability through any of her vagaries or whims. Her reluctance to accept the claustrophobic responsibilities of her pinnacle position was

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Study in Power

rooted fathoms deep in her psyche, though her questioning of why this should be so was constantly repeated. She seemed the original "bird in a gilded cage," too intelligent, too proud and too stubborn to accept her captivity as part of the price she must pay.

My second impression was no less strong. It was the recognition of the internal conflict raging behind her usually controlled, sweetly smiling appearance: the conflict of trying to reconcile her deep, personal distaste for her public role as "First Lady and First Mother," with her overwhelming private devotion to her husband and children and her private sense of duty to them and consequent determination not to fail them.

Her husband had telephoned from Washington the previous day, and the delight with which she recounted their conversation was not simulated. It was a touching, almost child-like demonstration of a magnificent passion which she could, it seemed to me, describe more easily to someone else than she could to her husband, and make that someone else understand more clearly. One could have been forgiven for regarding this with a certain amount of

scepticism, for at the time, rumours of difficulties and mutual coolness in their marriage had appeared in the world press. I was, however, to understand more about this during longer conversations we were to have subsequently, in Washington and in Virginia.

Chocolate Box Figure

MY THIRD impression was the complete transformation that came over her when one was alone with her. That enigmatic, slightly distant, reticent, politely attentive, almost chocolate-box figure—even when in as small and intimate a group as her sister and brother-in-law—opened out in the most dramatic way.

Flesh and blood instead of a symbol, she no longer tried to disguise the Protean quality of her character, the paradoxes, the irreconcilable desires, the incompatibilities, the illogicalities, the frustrations, the dammed outlets, and the impossible idealisms.

At one moment she was misunderstood, frustrated and helpless. The next moment, without any warning she was the royal, loyal First Lady to whom it was almost a duty to bow, to pay mediaeval obeisance. Then again without any warning she was deflating someone with devastating barbs for being such a spaniel as to treat her as the First Lady, and deriding the pomp of politics, the snobbery of a social climber. It was Pavlovian treatment.

Candle-lit Dining

IT WAS TWO MONTHS before I saw her again.

On Sunday 21st October 1962, I arrived at Washington airport, two hours late, having flown direct from London to stay at the British Embassy. I had also lost my luggage. So my appearance and temper were far from perfect when I was summoned to a desk and there told to take a taxi to the White House.

After a few minutes' brush-up and clean-up, I was shown straight into the candle-lit dining-room. The party consisted of the President and his wife, the British Ambassador and his wife, and the Duchess of Devonshire. They were halfway through the first course. I was seated on Jacqueline Kennedy's left.

I have two principal recollections of that dinner. The first was that Mrs. Kennedy and I immediately resumed our conversation almost at the point we had left it at Ravello. The second was that the President kept having to get up from the table to answer the

telephone just behind me. (I later learned that it was during one of these telephone conversations that he first heard of the certain confirmation by aerial photographs of the missile bases in Cuba.) But talking to him, I had no inkling of the international crisis that was brewing. True, he was fidgety, but I put that down to the incessant telephone interruptions which I assumed to be an inseparable part of an informal White House dinner. He was still attentive, firing his usual batteries of questions about people in whom he was interested, small details of their behaviour, their motives and secret ambitions; all the tiny facts about people which he fitted into the mosaic of his mind.

Jacqueline Kennedy was more restrained. As she explained the next day, she was very conscious of the strain the President was under, but could say nothing about it at the time. We left almost immediately after dinner, at the British Ambassador's suggestion. (He knew of the crisis.) As we said goodnight, Jacqueline Kennedy said she would see us all on Tuesday evening.

The headlines in all the papers next morning read similarly: "CRISIS." The details were unspecified, but it was hinted that Cuba had something to do with it.

Crisis Dinner

THE PARTY on the night of Tuesday the 23rd, was originally to have been a grand affair in honour of the Jaipurs in return for their kindness as hosts to Jacqueline Kennedy and her sister when they had toured India. Owing to the crisis, the affair became a small black-tie dinner-party with less than twenty people. After dinner, the President made an excellent speech thanking the Jaipurs, referring to the beautiful Maharanee, in her role as a Right-wing Congresswoman, as "India's answer to Barry Goldwater!" As the guests moved into the long drawing-room, Robert Kennedy appeared, tired and haggard. The President and his brother went to the far end of the room and talked quietly in two arm-chairs. The rest of the guests gathered, at Jacqueline Kennedy's suggestion, at the other end of the room round the piano which I was asked to play. As soon as the President and his brother finished their discussion, they had a few words with the British Ambassador and then said good-night. The rest of the party, including the British Embassy contingent, then left. I remained, at Jacqueline Kennedy's request,

together with her sister Lee.

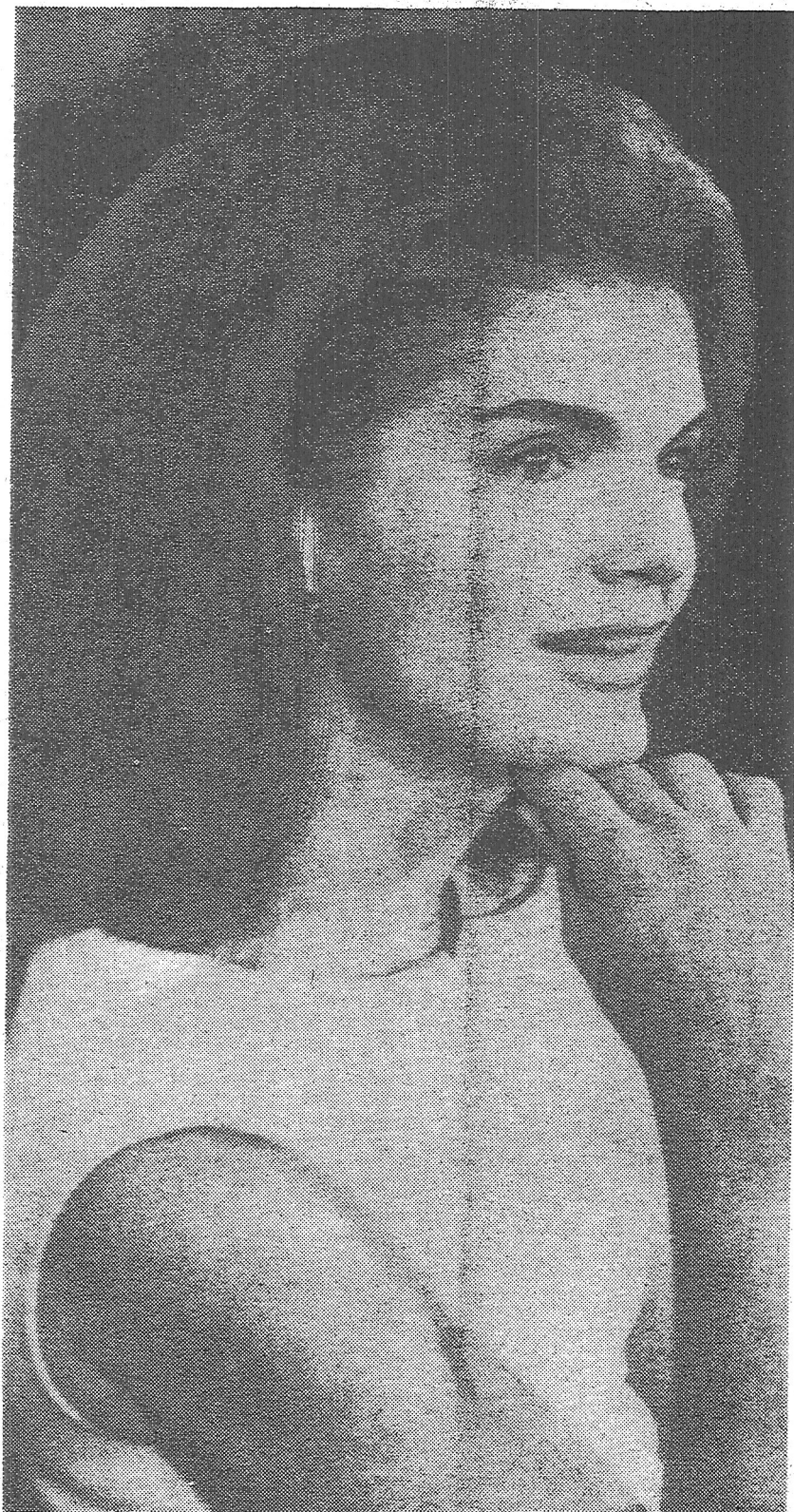
The contrast between her behaviour as hostess that evening and at the party the year before was marked. This time she was much more in control, much more sure of herself, more dominant, desperately trying to jolly the party along so that, first and foremost, the President could enjoy a brief respite from the crisis; secondly, so that the Jaipurs would have a genuinely happy evening; and finally so that she could combat the detectable though unspoken feeling among most of the guests that it was hardly the appropriate place or moment for gaiety and hearty singing around a piano, when at the other end of the room the President of the United States and the Attorney-General were deep in discussion about an international crisis which at that stage looked likely to end up in an exchange of thermonuclear weapons and a declaration of war.

When all the other guests had gone except for her sister, Mrs. Kennedy sat down, exhausted, by the piano, seeking reassurance that in spite of everything the President had enjoyed himself at least a little.

Caroline's Pumpkin

I SAW HER again two days later. She invited me to the White House after lunch.

Then she took me up to the drawing-room where we had a drink and talked until after tea, when Caroline appeared with a large, hollow pumpkin. I was asked to carve faces on its outside for use in the next week's Halloween parties. Jacqueline Kennedy was taking flash photographs of me on my knees beside Caroline and the pumpkin, when in walked the President. He became immediately engrossed in Caroline and the pumpkin. I was asked to stay for dinner. After dinner, the President had a cigar and chatted, between telephone calls, about such diverse subjects as Lord Beaverbrook's way of running his newspapers, Frank Sina-



Associated Press

JACQUELINE KENNEDY

tra's handling of women, and why The Queen magazine had published a fashion picture of a model (Celia Hammond) lying on a white bear skin sucking her thumb. (Jacqueline Kennedy had said to me earlier: "For God's sake, don't mention Cuba to him.") In fact, he never specifically mentioned the crisis at all, either before, during or after dinner. He made only one reference to his disillusionment after trying to negotiate face-to-face with Khrushchev at their Vienna Summit Meeting. Almost as part of a soliloquy, he said quietly: "It's like trying to talk to people who've spent all their lives in a cellar."

He went to bed at about 10 p.m. Some time later he looked in in his nightshirt to say goodnight. Mrs. Kennedy and I sat talking until the small hours.

Virginia Visit

THAT FRIDAY, Jacqueline Kennedy told me to be at the White House immediately after lunch. With her sister Lee and Caroline, we travelled by helicopter to the small house in Virginia which the President had rented. We touched down in a field beside the house. After dinner, the two sisters and I sat talking for a while before Lee Radziwill went to bed. Jacqueline Kennedy had to rise at 7 a.m. the next morning to go hunting. I tried to dissuade her, but she would not hear of it.

Next evening I returned to Washington because the President was arriving for dinner for a few hours alone with his family.

I will now try to summarize what I felt I knew about Jacqueline Kennedy at that time. First, her relationship with the Kennedy family as a whole. Clearly, however loyal she was to them as a group of whom she was part, she was not at all at home with the tightly knit, clannish, boisterous Kennedys. She did not play touch football; she did not push people into swimming-pools; she did not live for power and politics and social acceptance. She could not produce children, heirs, Kennedys, with regular effortlessness. Also, she loathed publicity for herself and her children, especially she loathed her children being used as publicity attractions for political ends. (One male member of the Kennedy entourage once drew me aside at a White House party and asked me how well I knew Commander Colville, the Buckingham Palace Press Secretary. I replied that I didn't know him at all, why? "Oh, because we wanted you to help fix up a Life cover picture for the New Year issue, of Caroline and Prince

Charles hand in hand. You know, symbolizing youth and hope for the future and the two countries going on together. Can you imagine the impact?")

Steely, Impervious Mind

SHE LOVED literature, music, china, painting, poetry—and occasional doses of something few Kennedys understand: solitude. The only quality she shared with the Kennedys was the one quality they had not recognised in her—a steely, impervious, determined strength of mind. (She was obviously conscious, too, that the Kennedys thought she might be a flop, a let-down

quaint. And her admiration and affection for her brother-in-law Robert was unquestioned.

Great Tension

BUT, if her relationship with her husband was the most important thing in her life, at the same time it was, then at any rate, the most puzzling, the most complicated and the most tortuous. I did not know them in their first eight years of marriage. But I do know that, from their wedding day in 1953 onwards, John F. Kennedy's prime occupation was political campaigning, with his sights firmly set on the White House. And I do know enough of Jacqueline Kennedy's attitude to politics to guess that this must have caused great tension in her, making her feel neglected, or at any rate relegated to second place. It must also have caused long separations.

Then suddenly, when she saw that the Presidential nomination was actually within her husband's grasp, and knowing that she was expecting a baby with, as yet, no complications, it is my view that her outlook dramatically changed. It was as if someone had cleared a misted windscreen in front of her. Suddenly, the previous seven years of hated politics, all the ups and downs and humiliations and frustrations could be forgotten. She realised her husband had the touch of greatness in him, she recognised his charisma. What she also must have decided at the time, though it remained submerged deep within her, was that she was going to participate very actively—much more actively than any of the Kennedy political camp were then expecting. Subconsciously, she must have said "I'm going to show them." But it was not really "them" she wanted to prove herself to. It was her own husband. And what better than to present him with a son and heir?

Aware of Gossip

SHE WAS WELL AWARE of the gossip that her pregnancy was the result of a cunning Kennedy plot to time the birth to more or less coincide with the 1960 Presidential election and so lend added publicity attraction to the

as First Lady. It was not until her European trip with the President that the Kennedy family began to realize they had gravely underestimated the public impact of Jacqueline Kennedy. It was on this trip that the President significantly introduced himself as "I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris . . ."

So it was with a secret delight, tinged with a forgiveable element of pride, that she accepted the plaudits she was earning more and more in her own right. And who could grudge her, after all those years of being made to feel inadequate, a certain smug self-satisfaction as she sensed the Kennedys, one by one, recognising their own previous underestimation of her; never openly admitting it but making it known in uncommitted, implicit ways.

In referring to the Kennedys indiscriminately, I may be guilty of ignoring certain exceptions. For instance, Jacqueline Kennedy always showed great respect for her father-in-law, scrupulously calling him "Mister" Kennedy, which always sounded somewhat

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DOUGLAS-HOME

Kennedy cause. She was also well aware of the rumour that her father-in-law had offered her a million dollars not to divorce her husband. But when she recounted these canards to me, she merely scoffed at them.

No one who did really know her would have believed them. But the trouble was so few people did really know her, because it was part of her nature to eclipse herself deliberately. She was also well aware of the gossip prevalent about her own supposed "affairs." "What can I do," she would say, resignedly. "I have dinner with someone, dance with someone for more than one dance, stay with someone, get photographed with someone without Jack—and then everyone automatically says 'Oh, he must be her new lover.' How can you beat that?" I asked her once about one particularly well-known friend of hers. Why had the story stuck so persistently for so long?

Her answer was on these lines: "Do you know why? Because every time he is going to see me, he rings up the three biggest gossips in New York be-

forehand and says casually in the course of conversation, 'Oh, by the way, I'm going to nip down and see Jackie—she's asked me and she's desperately lonely and needs me—but of course you won't tell a soul, will you, because you know how embarrassing it would be for her if it got out...'"

Continental Aplomb

WITH TRUE Continental aplomb inherited from her father, she looked upon her husband's powers of attraction as a challenge to herself to be all

the more attractive and desirable and essential to him as a wife. She would sometimes say in a puzzled, touching way: "But I'm so different from the kind of girls Jack usually finds attractive..."

Jacqueline Kennedy was the kind of woman that the late President would marry but not the kind of woman whom he would have as a mistress. Yet at the same time he could not communicate with her with the same ease and fluency, however superficial, as he did with other women.

From what I saw of them together the same went for her. The extract from the letter she wrote to him from Greece, one of the bones of contention in the Manchester book rumpus, shows that, however deep and unquestioned her love, her capacity for expressing it to him in articulate terms, either spoken or written, was surprisingly limited in a woman who, when uninhibited, could write and speak both graphically and brilliantly. The pride in each other, their love for each other—these were both there. But the channels for communicating that pride and that love to each other were, it seemed, unaccountably blocked.

Adamant on Role

THE BIRTH of John Junior in 1960 may have started the process of relieving that blockage. But it is my opinion that JFK did not realize that he had married someone much more special than he had supposed until she took over the redecoration of the White House and its establishment as a historical and cultural centre worthy of the nation—which it had never been before. Culture was a word most of the Kennedy clan blanched at.

The other reason that the President found new respect for his wife after they moved into the White House was her adamant refusal to be deflected from what she regarded as her primary role to the exclusion of all else—to be wife and mother. First Lady or not—her intention was, and she made sure her husband could see it plainly, to create a home; to distract and amuse her husband when he came back in the evenings torn by the pressures and problems of his job; and to allow their children to grow up in as normal a setting as possible. Nothing in the world was going to deter her from that job. He was surprised and delighted at her strength of mind.

Understandably Intoxicating

AT THE SAME TIME, her own admiration for him as a husband was growing in direct proportion to the

world's increasing admiration and recognition of him as a statesman. The world, she thought, was merely, and rather belatedly, confirming what she had known for much longer. But still it comforted her to know that her judgment was being backed by millions. The satisfaction of being proved right, allied to the satisfaction of becoming an integral part of her husband's success, was a powerful combination, heady, understandably intoxicating. It was to lead her to subsequent errors of judgment. The wonder is that, in spite of all the inducements, she committed so few follies and behaved so magnificently. No woman in our time has been the victim of so many conflicting, powerful pressures: emotional, political, and personal. Frankly it is a wonder to me that Jacqueline Kennedy never lost her reason. Perhaps she did, for a period—later on.

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MONDAY: A week before Dallas she had never been happier.